

Remember by yozza

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Summary: Oneshot. Slash. Set during Season 2 Episode 8. While using stories from Will's past to try and break the Shadow Monster's hold over the boy, a guilt ridden James Wheeler; younger brother of Nancy, older brother of Mike; makes a confession, hoping to reach Will so he can make things right. Will he succeed? Or is the Shadow Monster's grasp too strong?

1. Chapter 1

So...first Stranger Things fic ever. Not sure how I've done.

This fic came about from a combination of three things: 1) Immense boredom, 2) A massive wall of writers block on my other stories and 3) A reinvigorated obsession with Stranger Things after binge watching Season 2. Since my other stories aren't going anywhere quick and I've got a couple of Stranger Things plot bunnies running rampant right now, I decided to get one out of my head.

Background: James Wheeler is the second Wheeler child. He's a year older than Mike and a few years younger than Nancy. During the events of the first season he was closely involved with Hopper and Joyce's storylines up until the very end, at which point he joined Mike/El's story for the finale. He helped Hop and Joyce build Will's map and was at the lab when the Demodogs attacked.

The story is set during episode 8 of S2, during the scene in the Byers shed when they're trying to talk to Will.

Note: Will, Mike etc are 13. James is therefore 14 in this story.

Disclaimer: The genius' that are the Duffer Bro's own Stranger Things. I am in no way affiliated with that amazing show no matter how much I might wish that I was.

James Wheeler was not a coward. He might not have been as smart Mike or Nancy, nor as attractive or popular as the latter but no one who had ever met him could deny his courage. His parents might not have a clue what to do with him or how to interact with him on any meaningful level but he had never shied away from any confrontation. He might be a loner and he might not be the smartest kid in his class but the instant he saw Mike or his friends being picked on he was there in a heartbeat to defend them; he wore the resulting bruises with pride and held his head up high through the detentions. He wasn't a coward.

Jim Hopper and Joyce Wheeler could attest to that. So could Mike, Lucas and Dustin. James had happily disobeyed his parents to join the search for Will when he first went missing last year. He hadn't flinched at the danger he put his life in when he joined the Chief and Mrs Byers on their investigations after Hop discovered the Lab's attempted cover up. Jonathan Byers had not been the only one who wanted to join the pair when they went to rescue Will from the Upside Down and was not the only one who was refused. That same night, when the soldiers and later the Demogorgon had arrived at the school (unlike Jonathan and Nancy, he had followed orders and stayed put), he had been more than willing to stand up against impossible odds to protect the other kids, regardless of the danger he himself was in.

Nobody could say that James Wheeler was a coward.

But standing there, in the Byers shed, watching that *thing* possess Will, screaming to be let go until the boy's body was too exhausted to continue...James didn't know if he could do it.

Joyce was kneeling in front of her son. For all that the town mocked her, James had nothing but the deepest respect and admiration for the woman's strength. Especially now, James thought. With what had happened to Bob back in the lab; and James knew he would have nightmare's for weeks about that; and Will being so far gone, no one would have blamed her for completely breaking down. Instead, there she was, holding together far better than James ever could have.

Joyce pulled herself up and sat on a stool in front of Will, staring him straight in the eye. There was silence for a moment.

"Do you know what March 22nd is?" She asked softly. *Will's birthday*, his mind supplied *I got him a new record and learned how to play The Clash for him*. Joyce continued, after a few seconds without a response. She had tears in her eyes and a small smile on her face "Your birthday. Your. Birthday. When you turned eight, I gave you that *huge* box of crayons; do you remember that? It was a hundred and twenty colours. And all your friends they got you...Star Wars toys. But all you wanted to do, was draw with all your new colours. And you drew this huge spaceship. But it wasn't from a movie it...it was your spaceship. A rainbow ship, that's what you called it...and

you must have used every colour in the box,"

James remembered that ship. He hadn't been as close to his brothers friends back then as he was now. That hadn't happened until a year or so before Eleven and the Demogorgon. But they knew each other. He remembered Will showing it off to Mike one night. He'd been impressed. It had been the first time he'd seen one of Will's drawings up close and James remembered being stunned; and more than a little envious; of the younger boys talent.

The memory flashed through his mind in less than a second. Joyce continued. By now Will's eyes were wide and James swore he could see some actual, human emotion trying to break through. "I took that with me to Melvald's and I put it up and I...I told everyone who came in 'My son drew this'. You were so embarrassed, but I was so proud. I was so, so proud,"

The story had very clearly gotten a reaction from Will. Still mostly blank faced, there was definitely something that wasn't the Shadow Monster still in there.

Seeing this, Jonathan followed his mothers lead "Do you remember the day Dad left?" Will turned his head towards him, breath hitching ever so slightly, and James frowned. That didn't seem like the sort of memory to draw him out. Jonathan knelt next to Joyce "We stayed up all night building Castle Byers; just the way you drew it. And it took so long, because you were so bad at hammering," Joyce laughed a little and so did Jonathan. James couldn't help the small grin that escaped, despite the situation. Will's lip was trembling; with emotion or whether he was trying to speak James couldn't tell. "Missed the nail every time. Then it started raining, but we stayed out there anyway. We were both sick for like a week after that. But we just had to finish it. Didn't we?" Will's fingers knocked against the post he was tied to "We just had to," Jonathan finished, looking ready to cry as well.

Castle Byers was a familiar setting to James at this point. It had been Will's escape for many years but since last year it had become almost a safe haven for him. Whenever things got too bad, the memories too overwhelming that was where he'd run to. They always knew when that happened. He was quiet and withdrawn in school all day and

they knew he would head straight to Castle Byers. They never all went; but every time it happened one of them would bike after him and make sure he was okay. Sometimes he appreciated the company; other times he told them to go away. None of them ever did. Lucas and Dustin both went on more than one occasion and Mike had always been protective of his smallest friend. But it was James who stayed with him the most; who sat with him in Castle Byers as Will just drew pictures until he could forget again.

"Do you remember the first day that we met?" Mike asked, drawing Will's attention, and James put his hand on his brother's shoulder in comfort "It was the first day of Kindergarten. I knew nobody. I had no friends. I just felt...so alone and so scared. But I saw you on the swings and you were alone too; just swinging by yourself," tears were brimming in Will's eyes now and Mike didn't even make an attempt to wipe away his own that were already rolling down his face. "And I just walked up to you and asked. I asked if you wanted to be my friend; and you said yes. You said yes. It was the best thing I've ever done," James placed his arms around Mike's shoulders and pulled him into his side.

James glanced around the room. Only he and Hopper hadn't said anything yet. Hop wouldn't have any stories like that about Will, so that left him. But what could he say. He wasn't Will's mother or brother or best friend. He was...It was complicated now. Their relationship. James didn't really know what he was to Will anymore and he was sure Will felt the same. That had been the point behind his asshole attitude for the past five months after all.

There was only one memory that came to mind; and James had hoped to avoid ever thinking about the topic ever again.

"June 18th. Do you remember that day?" Mike craned his head to look at him, confusion written all over his face "You'd had a D&D game at our place but you seemed out of it. Your mom and Jonathan were both in work so, I said I'd ride to yours with you. When we got there you went straight into the woods, to Castle Byers, and I went with you because I was worried about you. We must have sat there for nearly an hour; you didn't even draw anything. Then, you turned to me and asked what you should do if you liked someone. Someone you weren't supposed to like. You asked what you should do; and

what I would say; if you liked another boy,"

He could feel Jonathan's wide eyes on him, probably a bit confused and maybe a bit hurt that it wasn't him Will had confided in. Glancing to the left, he saw Hopper raise an eyebrow but nothing more. No disgust. No hatred. No anger. Good. James looked at Will again; a tear escaped the corner of his eye. They were so close.

"I told you I didn't care. I thought I knew who it was; I'd seen the way you acted around him, the way you looked at him. I told you to tell him, that he wouldn't mind. That he would never hurt you even if he didn't feel the same way; and that I'd kick his ass if he did," he chuckled slightly there. Mike huffed a slight laugh. The corner of Will's lips twitched.

James glanced at his brother once more before continuing "I told you...I...I said I'd; I'd talk to Mike. About how much he talks about Eleven. I figured that must hurt, hearing the guy you like talk non-stop about a girl you'd never even met," Mike had stiffened at his side and Joyce had sucked in a sharp breath to mirror Jonathan's small gasp. James smiled "But you...you looked at me and called me an idiot. You said it was never Mike. Then you, you leaned over and kissed me," It has been uncharacteristically bold of Will to take the initiative like that. He had become shy and quiet and reserved again almost instantly after, as though every scrap of courage he could muster had been used on that one kiss. Ignoring the sharp look Jonathan sent him, James pressed on "I sort of froze at first. I was a bit shocked, I guess. But then I kissed back,"

James smiled ruefully. "But then I was an idiot wasn't I?" he spat bitterly, to the frowns of the others in the room "I started ignoring you. When you said my name, I pretended not to hear. Whenever I saw you I'd pretend that I hadn't," he felt tears in his own eyes now. Jonathan was slightly red in the face, jaw clenched. Mike was staring at him aghast. "I avoided you. Looked away every time you tried to catch my eye. Didn't speak to you, didn't even look at you."

He choked back a sob "I knew how much that hurt you. I knew; but I did it anyway because...because I don't deserve you. I'm not good enough. I hang out behind the school with the smokers and the stoners; I get into fights all the time, just for the thrill of it; I'm

always in trouble. I'd only end up hurting you. So I tried to...distance myself, tried to push you away. Because you're good and kind and smart and everything that I'm not. You deserve so much more; so much better; than I could ever be."

He knelt next to Joyce, directly in front of Will; who's tears had, by this point, begun to silently cascade down his cheeks. James reached out and wrapped his hand around the boy's smaller one. "Will; I'm sorry." James absently noted that his voice was thick with emotion and that he was barely stopping himself from sobbing like a child "I'm so, so sorry. For hurting you; for ignoring you. For everything. Please, fight it Will. We need you. I need you," he bowed his head, partly to hide his tears and mostly from shame. He clutched Will's hand tighter.

"Will; baby; if you're in there just please, please talk to us," Joyce pleaded "Can you do that for me? Please I love you so much,"

Will was trembling. It was though there was a battle raging inside of him. He was clearly trying to fight his way back. His mouth parted slightly only to close again, lips trembling as the boy tried to speak only to be forced back. His face contorted at the effort, managing to force only a single word out of his mouth.

"Jamie," he said in a soft gentle whisper. So quiet it couldn't have been heard if there had been even the slightest of noises in the shed. But in the silence that surrounded them, James heard it. His head snapped up at the childhood nickname. After his tenth birthday, only two people in the world had called him Jamie. One was dead. The other was sitting in front of him.

But as quick as it appeared it was gone. All emotion was wiped away, leaving only a blank stare in its wake. His voice was flat when he spoke again. The creature was, quite clearly, back in control.

"Let me go," he said listlessly. Joyce let out a deep, mournful sigh and closed her eyes. Jonathan stared at him. James forced himself to pull his hand from Will's and step away. Will's voice stopped him before he got far "Let me go, Jamie. If you really love me, let me go,"

He couldn't do it. He couldn't stand here and listen to that thing use

Will's voice and face. He turned on his heel and stormed out of the shed. He passed Mike, who he heard shout after him, and Hop, who gave him a tired smile he thought might have been meant to be comforting. He threw the door open and stormed out, slamming it closed behind him. He didn't go into the house. Couldn't stand it, not then. He paced the back yard instead, emotions swirling inside him. Anger. Heartbreak. Grief. Guilt. Despair. He couldn't handle it. He wanted to scream, to rage, to fight, to hit something. So he did. With an angry bellow James brought his fist into the wooden wall of the Byers house. He felt his knuckle split on the impact. But it wasn't enough. So he did it again. Then a third time and a fourth and then kept going. On the fourth he felt; or perhaps heard; something crack inside his hand. A few hits after that he suspected a few more 'somethings' had been broken. He was only going by the crack's he'd heard. At that moment, he couldn't feel a thing.

It was after the eleventh punch that he distantly heard someone say his name and then he was being pulled away from the wall and spun around to stare into his sisters eyes. James' composure held for barely a second longer. The tears began to fall and within a heartbeat Nancy had wrapped her arms around him and pulled him into her, holding him as he cried.

It was in that moment that James made a promise to himself. He was going to kill that fucking shadow bastard, even if it was the last thing he ever did.

Honestly not sure how good this is or how well it'll be received. Also my spell checker isn't working, so while I've done my best at editing, there may still be a few small errors I failed to spot.

Here's hoping it goes down well. If there's interest I might write a full story based around this further down the line.

But I think that's everything for now. So if you liked it, please leave a review. They make my day and the more support I get for this the more likely it is that I'll do a larger story at some point.

2. AN

What's up guys! This is just to let you know that I have begun a full story based around James under the title 'The Other Wheeler'. I've published the story and it should be available within a few hours, if any of you are interested.